THE NEW SCHOOL
FILM SERIES 31t Program 34th
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THE TURN OF THE TIDE (British National Pictures, 1953; released by Gaumont-British) Directed by Norman Walker; produced by John Corfield; Camera, Franz Planer; Scenario by L. Du Garde Peach and J.C.C. Orton from the novel "Three Fevers" by Leo Walsley; Music, Arthur Benjamin; 80 minutes.
With John Garfield, Waltraud Fitzgerald, Wilfred Lawson, Maureen O'Sullivan, J. Fisher White, Sam Livesey, Joan Maude, Moore Marriott, Derek Blomfield.

Robert Flaherty's "Man of Aran" spanned a number of unpretentious follow-ups in the British cinema of the mid-30's, and, something that rarely happens, at least two of the follow-ups - Michael Powell's "The Edge of the World" and tonight's film, "The Turn of the Tide" - were superior to their inspiration. Although "The Turn of the Tide" received extremely good reviews at the time, it was relegated to an art-house booking in London (playing with the French "The Eve of the Battle") and soon disappeared from view. Never revived officially in Britain, it is virtually an unknown film here - much to the consternation of those who saw it initially - and it was never released in this country, though it did turn up in some early TV packages. Quite incidentally it is a major footnote to British film history in that it was a film financed by millionaire Miller J. Arthur Rank as a trial balloon for a Methodist film production unit. It is not in any way a religious film, but it contains humanistic and moral values of which the church certainly approved. Its failure to achieve worthwhile distribution or exhibition led Rank to enter the industry officially, becoming in the 1940's the Citizen Kane of British movies, eventually creating a production-distribution-exhibition empire which totally monopolised the British industry. As a film it is simple, direct, yet lyrical - the latter deriving primarily from the superb camerawork of Flanz Planer (Ophul's favorite cameraman) who seems to have criss-crossed the sea shores, cliffs and woods with camera tracks to ensure maximum mobility, whereas it is mainly the big storm scene for the climax - it makes up for its dramatic honesty and pictorial beauty. It's a thoroughly pleasing, professionally acted work, one of the few really good films to come from generally rather stodgy British National Pictures. It is certainly also the best film to be directed by Norman Walker, earlier a director of quota quickies, and later promoted by Rank to producer status - where he turned out rather dull and pompous "prestige" films like "The Great Mr. Havelock".

--- Ten Minute Intermission ---

"49th PARALLEL" (Ortus Productions-General Film Distributors, 1941; U.S.release in 1942 by Columbia under the title "The Invaders"); Directed and Produced by Michael Powell; Production Supervisor, John Sutro; Scenario by Emrie Pressburger and Rodney Ackland from an original story and screenplay by Pressburger; Director of photography, Freddie Young; assistant cameraman, Skeets Kelly and Henty Creel; Music, Ralph Vaughn Williams; edited by David Lean; art Director, David Rawnsley; made at Denham Studios, England, and the Associated Sound News Studios in Montreal; 110 minutes.


Preceding Noel Coward's "In Which We Serve" by almost a year, "49th Parallel" was not only one of the few big prestige British pictures of the early years of the war, but also (in Britain at least) one of the few films of American Affiliation which remind America that war need not be too far from her own borders, and to perhaps prepare the way for American intervention. The purely propagandist content does boomerang a little today; the British/Canadian hero "types" all seem somewhat artificial and over-written today, although Walbrook's superb playing does bring his role to life. Surely unintended in 1941 is the fact that the efficacy of the Nazi, so well played by Eric Portman, turns him into a kind of unwitting hero. One doesn't so much mind him being defeated at the end as one resents the way he is defeated - in very unsportsmanlike fashion by a dull cod who warrants even less sympathy. (In the same way, one resented Robert Cummings' triumph over Nazi villain Otto Kruger in Hitchcock's "Saboteur"). But apart from the strange let-down of the ending - a let-down duplicated by the fate of Walter Biszak's Nazi in another Hitchcock film, "Lifeboat" - and genuine flaws in the film (no Walter Pidgeon, no Walter Huston, not even Dennis Durbin or Fay Wray) it does hold up as a piece of well-sustained, near-documentary chase adventure. Most of it was shot on location in Canada, and there's a modicum of studio-shot inserts, these being particularly obvious in the Leslie Howard sequence. It has less of the cinematic fireworks of the later Powell-Pressburger films, and more of the simplicity of the earlier solo Powell works like "The Spy in Black" and "Edge of the World".

--- Wm. A. Everson ---

A reminder: next week's program will substitute "The Unholy Garden" with Ronald Colman and Fay Wray for Colman's "Cynara".